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While we were travelling through Singapore airport recently and subsequently spending 10 days in an Auckland MIQ facility, I became more acutely aware of the current frequent use of the words *donning* and *doffing*.

We came across them most often in the context of donning and doffing personal protective equipment or PPE. For example, the airport had two adjacent sets of cubicles, one labelled “donning stations” and the other “doffing stations”. Interestingly, the first had its text and outline in green, the second in red.

I think what made these usages remarkable to me is that the verbs *don* and *doff* are otherwise very infrequent, and my previous encounters with them had been in rather restricted and primarily literary contexts, such as reading of someone doffing their hat as a respectful greeting. Suddenly it seemed like we were seeing them everywhere.

We should remember, though, that the frequency with which words occur is not uniform across contexts and that there are vocational differences in usage. I suspect that my friends and colleagues in



Donning and doffing

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medical circles find the appearance of *donning* and *doffing* unremarkable.

We got to wondering where these words came from and a dive into the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) confirmed that they started life as contractions, for “do on” and “do off”. Now, of course, we express these meanings by using *put* with *on* and *take* with *off*.

While we can still say that front-line workers put on and take off PPE, and

made of two components that could be separated by another word (like *put on* and *take off*). A verse from the Song of Solomon in a 16th-century Bible includes *I haue (have) put off my cote (coat), how can I do it on agayne?*

The OED observes that from the 16th and 17th centuries onwards both *don* and *doff* became restricted to northern varieties (i.e., to the north of England), elsewhere being archaic. In his 1755 *Dictionary* Johnson noted at the end of his entry for *doff* that this “word is in all its senses obsolete, and scarcely used except by rusticks”.

Both *don* and *doff* saw something of a revival in the 19th century as literary words with an archaic flavour, and the word *donnings* is attested from that time as an expression meaning one’s Sunday clothes or finery.

I took to Google for a quick survey of recent history, searching for the forms *donning* and *doffing*, since searching *don* would give hits for the name or a Spanish nobleman or an Oxbridge lecturer.

Searching over each of the past three calendar years, I found increasing hits for *donning*, from 219,000 in 2019 to 291,000 in 2020 and 329,000 in 2021. While *donning* is more frequent than *doffing*, the latter rose dramatically, from 26,400 in 2019 to 60,200 in 2020 and then to 73,200 in 2021.

If these numbers are indicative of changes in how often the words are used (rather than just in how much stuff gets put on the internet), we seem to be doing a lot more donning and doffing under Covid.

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Name stoush needs an amicable finish

Views from around the world. These opinions are not necessarily shared by *Stuff* newspapers.

At *The Scotsman*, we like to think we know a little bit about Scotland. So we were somewhat taken aback to read that Forfar is known for its cheese curds, which are apparently delivered five days a week. And we were equally confused when we discovered Aberdeen has a population of just 622 people, and St Andrews is not far from Cornwall.

But then we realised, this is not Scotland at all – it’s Canada! Suddenly, it all made sense. There are, it’s fair to say, a lot of Scottish-sounding names in many former colonies, particularly Canada.

However, names can be a most serious business when there’s money involved, such as when they

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are “brand names”. So it is that the Scotch Whisky Association is currently embroiled in a legal dispute with a Canadian distiller over the use of “Scottish sounding names”. And, given the importance of Scotch whisky to our economy, who can blame them?

On the one hand, we sort of feel we should shudder at the thought. But, on the other, given the historic connections between the two countries and the many descendants of the Scottish diaspora who have maintained a distinctively Scottish culture in North America, we really hope that an amicable solution can be reached and glasses raised to one another in the spirit of friendship.